#10

This Thesis is ascertained to be a copy of that presented by Mr. Theodore Physick Mc Cay

AN

ESSAY

ON

DYSENTERY

BY

WILLIAM JOHNSON

OF

DELAWARE

Passed March 10th. 1826

1825

Dysentery, the subject of the present essay, is defined by Cullen to be a contagious pyrexy with frequent mucous or bloody evacuations, accompanied with griping or tenesmus, the alvine feces being for the most part retained. In giving to this disease a contagious character, Dr. Cullen has been followed by most of the British and Continental writers. This opinion however has been combatted by Professor Chapman and other American physicians, who assert, that ordinarily it is not capable of being propagated from one individual to another, and that this circumstance never takes place unless the disease assumes a Typhoid type. Independently of all authority personal observation would induce us to question the accuracy of Cullen's definition in this respect. But with this exception his definition could not perhaps be amended.

Dysentery appears to be of ancient origin, having been known so far back as the days of Hippocrates. Although peculiar to no country, it is much more prevalent in some than in others. In certain districts of our own country it prevails to an alarming extent, and often with great fatality. In Hospitals, Jails, Camps, and other crowded receptacles, it frequently assumes a most malignant aspect. This disease may occur at any season of the year, but generally it makes its appearance about the end of Summer or beginning of Autumn. In some seasons sporadic cases of the disease are met with; in others it prevails epidemically. Dysentery sometimes commences with chilliness which is soon succeeded by fever, accompanied with griping, and an ineffectual desire to go to stool.

But perhaps more frequently the typical affection appears without being preceded by rigour or chillness; and in very many instances there is little or no febrile action. Sometimes the disease is attended by flatulence, nausea and vomiting. The discharges though frequent, are small in quantity and of an unnatural appearance, consisting for the most part of slime or mucus mixed with blood, though not unfrequently they are purely sanguineous and unaccompanied by a faecal smell. Those small indurated masses, so commonly noticed by authors under the term Scybala, are of very unusual occurrence. If the disease be not arrested, all of the symptoms become aggravated. The countenance assumes a peculiarly distressed appearance, the strength

Rapidly sinks, the extremities become cold, hiccough supervenes with other symptoms which are usually the precursors of a fatal catastrophe. But when the disease is about to have a favourable termination, the pulse becomes softer, a moisture appears on the surface, the stools are less frequent, and more copious and natural, accompanied by an alleviation of the tormina and tenesmus.

Dysentery, as has already been intimated, may sometimes though very rarely, be propagated by contagion. Most generally however, it is produced by those causes which determine to the bowels, by checking perspiration. Occasionally, it is brought on by acrid and indigestible articles taken into the Stomach.

When the disease presents itself in chronic form, it has been at times epidemic, but is not contagious.

With regard to the pathology of dysentery, it is now well ascertained that there is always more or less inflammation of the mucous membrane of the large intestines, more and less extending to the small, and even to the stomach. This inflammation, when mild, produces but increased mucous discharge, but common to the inflammation of all mucous membranes; but when severe it has a strong tendency to terminate in ulceration.

In the treatment of dysentery, much has been said about the propriety of evacuation. Some of the dissenters

the nature of the disease we should not hesitate about using the lancet when there is a hard full pulse and other symptoms indicative of an inflammatory diathesis. But, even under these circumstances little or no benefit is usually derived, unless the quantity of blood abstracted be very considerable. Still with a simple febrile tumor opium always suffices, as long as the symptoms thus indicate it continue it may be repeated without any apprehension of injurious consequence. Upon directed by a careful and discriminating judgment it acts by relieving the spasmodic relaxation of the bowels, relates inflammatory exchanges as it does the surface or at least by enabling the skin to resume the functions of the system to the impression

of other remedies. Yet it must be confessed that there are many cases in which the lancet must be dispensed with, and others in which it cannot be used without manifest injury; this is particularly observable in some seasons, and in certain districts of country where the disease from the commencement assumes a typoid character.

Having dismissed venesection as a first operation as contra-indicated by the state of the system, we must in the next place proceed to cleanse the alimentary canal. For this purpose, where there is much gastric derangement, caused by nausea, and vomiting of bilious and other foul matters, as is often the case in unhealthy situations, it will be advisable to direct an emetic, and in this

instance ipecacuanha is perhaps preferable to the antimonial preparations. Though we are aware that the emetic tartar, James's powder and the vinum antimonii cruatum are recommended by practitioners of no little eminence. With respect to the latter article, which was introduced into regular practice by the classic Cullen and afterwards so highly extolled by Sir John Pringle, we have never seen even with a view to its emetic operation. But when exhibited in small doses, and in the early stage of the disease, we have repeatedly witnessed the most striking benefit from it, especially in that form of the disease, accompanied by considerable mucous discharges. In these cases it is

sometimes acts as a cathartic, imparting, as in the tardy alvine dejections; at other times it arrests the disease without any visible operation.

Cathartics have been consecrated to the treatment of dysentery, by the unanimous consent of practitioners in every section of the world. Still, there some difference of opinion prevails as to the relative efficacy of the articles composing this class. Calomel is perhaps the most suitable purgative to commence with. But in order to attain its full effect, judicious personal observation should be given it must be given in large doses; and it is one of those medicines whose cathartic

the operation is not in a ratio proportionate to an increase of the ordinary use we need not be apprehensive of its producing hypercathartis. There then only here I can surprise at the singular impression which twenty grains of Calomel made on the disease, when comparatively little benefit was produced by half that quantity. The bowels being pointed on by means of the Mercurial purgation just mentioned we may have recourse to some of the other medicines of the Materia Medica. I do some cases especially where the opium fails, or what perhaps indeed often, the bile which is combined with much purulent & lactaceous colour, such as

without a few drops of laudanum according to the circumstances of the case.

In consequence of the severe spasms and spasmodic irritation it would not be required, but a dose of opium. Nevertheless, if there be much inflammatory action, its use is contraindicated until this action is in some measure subdued by direct depletion. Although the use of this remedy is universally condemned by the medical authorities of Calcutta, we are inclined to doubt the existence of this error, that we do not consider this objection to it founded on true pathology. The state of our knowledge respecting the constitution of the brain appears to, rendering the spasm due solely to an irritation, and, consequently, decreasing the quantity of the [illegible]

principle, when combined with purga-
tives they promote their operation.
Tart Antimony is commonly given
in combination with some of the
articles which determine to the
skin &c. Lovers Powder or Pul-
vis Prepparatus has this description
is also mentioned, and with the
most decided utility. It seems
to have the matter a permanent
impression on the disease it
must be repeated every five or
six days and sometimes oftener.
Occasionally also it may be
advisable to add to Lovers
powder a portion of Calomel.
Pulvis Diaphoreticus Niger may
be employed with any invalid
advantage. It is commonly
given, combined with Spec-
acuanha, in the proportion of
half a grain to the former one.

of the latter and two of Calomel to be repeated every three or four hours. Besides those remedies which have already been enumerated, various others have at different times been recommended in the treatment of dysentery. But into the consideration of these I cannot, at this time enter, without encroaching too much on your time and patience. Suffice it to say that among these are Ipecacuanha, than which no article has been more highly extolled, Saccharum Saturni, Prussiat of Iron, Charcoal, the mineral acids, opium, suppositories, butter, flaxseed tea, with laudanum, Starch and other enemata; Epispastics, the warm bath, hot fomentations, the flannel roller &c most of which may, at

times be resorted to, with unequivocal advantage.

As yet we have said nothing respecting the diet in Dysentery. There being much irritation and inflammation, the patient must evidently be restricted to the most bland articles, and even they should be given in a fluid form. Rice Water, Barley Water, Vermut Whey, the mucilages of Tragacanth & Arabic, Flipsey elm, Sago, Arrow Root, Tapioca &c, are of this nature and will be found to afford sufficient nourishment.